

Message Text

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SUBJECT: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. PRESIDENT LOPEZ, SHORTLY FOLLOWING HIS CONFRONTATION WITH THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY AND THE RESULTANT "CABINET CRISIS" OF SEP 10, REACTED HARSHLY AND PUBLICLY TO A NEW YORK TIMES EDITORIAL AND, ON SEPT 13, ISSUED A COMMUNIQUE THAT PLACED ON THE U.S. RESPONSIBILITY FOR COLOMBIA'S BURGEONING DRUG TRAFFIC. THE CONSERVATIVES, IN THE WAKE OF THE DONA BERTHA "CRISIS", RE-EXAMINED THEIR SITUATION AND LARGELY AGREED TO CONTINUE THEIR COURSE OF PARTICIPATION IN THE ADMINISTRATION WHILE WAITING FOR DIVISIONS WITHIN THE MAJORITY LIBERAL PARTY. THE MURDER OF THE COMPTROLLER OF BARRANQUILLA PROVIDED YET ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF THE PERSISTENCE OF VIOLENT CRIME IN COLOMBIA AND GAVE IMPETUS TO THE WORK OF THE RECENTLY FORMED JUDICIARY REFORM COMMITTEE. THE PRESIDENT OF THE INFLUENTIAL NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF INDUSTRIALISTS (ANDI) EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT THE GOC REQUIREMENT FOR FOREIGN BANKS TO SELL DOWN TO MINORITY POSITIONS WOULD PUT EXCESSIVE DEMANDS ON THE LIMITED SUPPLY OF COLOMBIAN CAPITAL. END SUMMARY.

2. FOR THE SECOND TIME IN THREE DAYS, PRESIDENT LOPEZ GAVE A
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DEMONSTRATION OF HIS EXTREME SENSITIVITY AND HIS TENDENCY TO

OVERREACT TO CRITICISM. WHILE COLOMBIAN POLITICAL FIGURES WERE STILL BUSY PAPERING OVER THE "CABINET CRISIS" OCCASIONED BY MRS OSPINA'S ALLEGATIONS OF VENALITY IN THE LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION (BOGOTA 8823), THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE READ AND RESPONDED PUBLICLY TO THE NEW YORK TIMES SEPT 12 EDITORIAL, "TERROR IN COLOMBIA". ALTHOUGH THE EDITORIAL WAS ESSENTIALLY FAVORABLE TO LOPEZ... "NO ONE CAN FAIRLY CHASTISE PRESIDENT LOPEZ FOR FAILING TO ELIMINATE A PHENOMENON OF THE TIMES"...THE PIECE ALSO INCLUDED A PASSING REFERENCE TO THE CHARGES LEVELED BY MRS OSPINA. THE PRESIDENT'S RESPONSE (BOGOTA 8825) INCLUDED THE ACCUSATION THAT THE U.S., BECAUSE OF ITS INABILITY TO CONTROL ITS CITIZENS, WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DRUG TRAFFIC IN COLOMBIA. ALTHOUGH THE LOPEZ STATEMENT RECEIVED FRONT PAGE COVERAGE IN THE BOGOTA PRESS, THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE FOLLOWUP AND NEITHER POLITICIANS NOR OTHER OPINION LEADERS APPEAR INTERESTED IN PURSUING A MATTER THAT COULD CAST A SHADOW OVER NEXT WEEK'S MEETING BETWEEN PRESIDENTS FORD AND LOPEZ.

3. THE MINI-CRISIS, WHICH WAS PROVOKED LAST WEEK BY DONA BERTHA DE OSPINA'S ARTICLE INSINUATING CORRUPTION AT HIGH LEVELS OF THE LOPEZ ADMINISTRATION, HAS SUBSIDED. NEVERTHELESS, THE INCIDENT LEFT BEHIND STRESSES WITHIN THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY AS WELL AS TENSIONS BETWEEN THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY ON THE ONE HAND, AND THE ADMINISTRATION AND THE LIBERAL PARTY ON THE OTHER. LOPEZ STATEMENT THAT HE WOULD NOT DEAL WITH THE CONSERVATIVE DIRECTORATE (DNC) WHILE DONA BERTHA REMAINED ON THAT BODY CREATED CONFLICT WITHIN THE PARTY OVER THE ISSUE OF DONA BERTHA'S REMOVAL. CHAMBER PRESIDENT SANTOFIMIO ALSO ANNOUNCED THE "FREEZING" OF CONTACTS BETWEEN THE LIBERALS AND CONSERVATIVES IN THE LOWER HOUSE UNTIL THE DISPUTE BETWEEN LOPEZ AND THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY IS RESOLVED. THE CONSERVATIVES ARE ATTEMPTING TO FINESSE THE ISSUE BY THE FORMATION OF A KIND OF EXECUTIVE DIRECTORATE WHICH WOULD BE COMPOSED OF CONSERVATIVE EX-PRESIDENTS AND FORMER PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES. THERE IS BROAD AGREEMENT IN THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY, HOWEVER, ON THE POLICY OF CONTINUING AS PARTICIPANTS IN THE GOVERNMENT AND CONSERVATIVES ARE NOW BENT ON ACCOMMODATING THEMSELVES TO THE LIBERAL DEMANDS IN SUCH A WAY AS TO MINIMIZE DISSENSION WITHIN THEIR OWN PARTY.

4. SECURITY PROBLEMS CONTINUE. COLOMBIA CONTINUED TO EXPERIENCE
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MORE VIOLENCE AND SECURITY PROBLEMS. KIDNAPPINGS OCCURRED IN SEVERAL REGIONS. MONEY APPEARED TO BE THE MOTIVE. IN BARRANQUILLA, SEPT 14, THE ATLANTIC DEPARTMENTS COMPTROLLER-GENERAL AND HIS WIFE WERE SLAIN. IT WAS WIDELY SPECULATED THAT THE KILLINGS WERE THE WORK OF CRIMINAL ELEMENTS INTENT ON PREVENTING THE REVELATION BY THE COMPTROLLER OF CORRUPTION AMONG DEPARTMENTAL OFFICIALS. DURING THE WEEK PRESIDENT LOPEZ INSTALLED A COMMISSION HEADED BY FORMER PRESIDENT
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DARIO ECHANDIA TO DRAFT PROPOSED REFORMS IN THE PENAL CODE. HE TOOK THE OCCASION TO DEFEND THE NEED FOR THE STATE OF SIEGE, CHARACTERIZING

IT AS "AN ATTEMPT TO REMEDY A...DEFICIENCY IN THE SWIFTNESS OF THE JUDICIAL PROCESSES". HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT A COUNTRY COMMITTED TO DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES CANNOT CONTINUE TO USE THE STATE OF SIEGE OR OPERATE UNDER A SYSTEM OF OUTMODED LAWS. HE ALSO TOOK ANOTHER SWIPE AT INTERNATIONAL DRUG TRAFFICKERS, STATING THAT 66 PERCENT OF CRIME IN COLOMBIA INVOLVES DRUG TRAFFICKING, WHILE ONLY 3 TO 4 PERCENT OF THE CRIMES TRIED BY THE MILITARY COURTS INVOLVE CRIMES AGAINST THE SECURITY OF THE STATE OR THE STABILITY OF INSTITUTIONS.

5. ANDI EXPRESSES CONCERN OVER COLOMBIANIZATION OF FOREIGN ENTERPRISES. NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF INDUSTRIALISTS (ANDI) PRESIDENT FABIO ECHEVERRY EXPRESSED CONCERN DURING THE ORGANIZATIONS ANNUAL MEETING IN CARTAGENA OVER THE GOC'S POLICY OF REQUIRING FOREIGN-OWNED BANKS AND INSURANCE COMPANIES TO SELL-DOWN TO A MINORITY POSITION. HE NOTED THE LARGE AMOUNTS OF CAPITAL REQUIRED TO IMPLEMENT ANDEAN PACT COMMITMENTS AND QUESTIONED WHETHER SUFFICIENT FUNDS WERE ALSO AVAILABLE TO BUY MAJORITY CONTROL OF FOREIGN ENTERPRISES. ACCORDING TO THE PRESS, FINANCE MINISTER BOTERO RESPONDED THAT "COLOMBIANIZATION" OF THE FOREIGN BANKS COULD BE ACCOMPLISHED WITHOUT DIFFICULTY AND THAT SUFFICIENT CAPITAL WAS AVAILABLE. HE RECALLED THAT A NUMBER OF EUROPEAN ENTERPRISES HAD BEEN NATIONALIZED AFTER WORLD WAR II WITHOUT PROBLEMS AND ADDED THAT "IN ANY EVENT "COLOMBIANAIZATION" IS IRREVERSIBLE AND WILL BE FAVORABLE TO THE COUNTRY".
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